

Resource Sheet #3

Interview with Ruth Eggleston

Interview of Ruth Eggleston. Interviewed by George Gilliam, Mason Mills, of The Ground Beneath Our Feet project. Ruth Eggleston lived in Prince Edward County during the school closing crisis. Her son Carl Eggleston was a student in middle school at the beginning of the crisis.

Read the primary source document provided below to identify the following: author/date of the source, reactions to desegregation (favorable, unfavorable or indifferent) and the success or failure of integration.

Mr. Gilliam: Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today.

Mrs. Eggleston: Very welcome.

Mr. Gilliam: I want to go back in time forty years. I want to go back to 1959 when you were a young mother with six children. . . There came a time in the summer of 1959 when the Board of Supervisors of Prince Edward County announced that they were not going to appropriate money to pay the teachers and reopen the schools. And that the schools would not be closed and would not reopen in the summer of 1959. Had you been prepared for that?

Mrs. Eggleston: No. Not really.

Mr. Gilliam: What had you heard about it?

Mrs. Eggleston: That, you know - I just heard that they were having a problem, and I kind of wasn't expecting that they would close, you know, like that.

Mr. Gilliam: Was your expectation that the schools would open?

Mrs. Eggleston: Oh, yeah. At one time. . . At least some of them, they did. You know.

Mr. Gilliam: When you got the word that the schools would not reopen, what was it like as a mother?

Mrs. Eggleston: It was devastating, really, you know, because we wanted them to be in school, and there was nothing, really, we could do at that time but hope and pray that it would soon, you know, be okay.

Mr. Gilliam: You got into September and the schools didn't open, you got into October and the schools still weren't open. What did you think then?

Mrs. Eggleston: We still was hoping that, you know, it would be resolved, which I thought it would be sooner than it was, you know.

Mr. Gilliam: Did you and your husband talk about –

Mrs. Eggleston: Oh, yes.

Mr. Gilliam: - what in the world you could do?

Mrs. Eggleston: We did. We did. We did a lot. We talked with other people, you know, the neighbors and other people who had children.

Mr. Gilliam: What were people saying?

Mrs. Eggleston: The same thing. They were hoping it would soon be over, and everything would, you know, be okay, back to normal, let's say.

Mr. Gilliam: Now, some people sent their kids to live with relatives in other areas.

Mrs. Eggleston: Yes. They did.

Mr. Gilliam: Did you have any friends that did that?

Mrs. Eggleston: Oh, yes. I had some.

Mr. Gilliam: Could you tell me who they were and where they went as best you can remember?

Mrs. Eggleston: Well, some went out of town, some went back to their hometown. I can't name specific people right now. I wasn't prepared for this - that question. But I knew a lot of people who sent their children with relatives, back to grandmothers, and, you know, relatives, sisters, aunts, and stuff like that, things like that.

Mr. Gilliam: But people were still separated from their families?

Mrs. Eggleston: Oh yes. Yes. For years some of them were - some never came back. You know, just stayed on over. . .

Mr. Gilliam: So, there came a time when you and your husband decided that the schools here were not going to reopen and if -

Mrs. Eggleston: We finally realized. Yeah.

Mr. Gilliam: And you realized that if you wanted your kids to go to school -

Mrs. Eggleston: We'd have to do something. Yeah. But we were from Amelia. So, we didn't want to send them back down there. So, that was when we decided to, you know, go to Cumberland.

Mr. Gilliam: And did your husband move his business to Cumberland or did you -

Mrs. Eggleston: No. We just had to go there and stay as much as we could, and then come back up - you know, he came back up here to run the business. You know, cause he didn't want to relocate the business hoping and praying that it would all be over and we could all do what we did just resume - they could go back to school.

Mr. Gilliam: Do you remember what month it was that you made the decision to move over to Cumberland?

Mrs. Eggleston: No. I don't. It was before school was over, but I don't remember the month.

Mr. Gilliam: So, Carl didn't actually - Carl and the other children didn't actually miss any school?

Mrs. Eggleston: No. They didn't miss any. No they didn't.

Mr. Gilliam: And when were you able to move back to Prince Edward County?

Mrs. Eggleston: It was - I believe it was the - when we knew that the school were going to be reopened, you know and then we came. They started back the same year the school reopened. Yes.

<http://www.vahistory.org/massive.resistance/documents.html>